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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a procedure designed to enhance the effectiveness of teaching writing skills in intermediate and advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. The procedure consists of a correction sheet and a testing technique. The student prepares a written assignment which is corrected by the instructor with regard to the student's individual ability. A correction sheet is then prepared by the student. The instructor compares the correction sheet with the original assignment and then prepares and administers individualized tests based on the correction sheets. Although additional work is required of the teacher in the preparation of individualized tests, the advantages of this method are that: (1) each student is motivated in an individualized way to overcome particular composition problems; and (2) a positive approach is taken in that strong emphasis is placed on correct forms rather than on mistakes. (CLK)

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# TEACHING ESL WRITING SKILLS: THE CORRECTION SHEET AND TESTING TECHNIQUE

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The effectiveness of teaching writing skills in intermediate or advanced English as a second language classes can be enhanced by using a "correction sheet" and testing technique. The procedure may be introduced at any time and has proved to be effective in motivating students individually to work toward overcoming their specific faulty writing habits.

The initial step in the procedure is each student's preparation of a written assignment in the form prescribed by the instructor. This usually includes such specifications as writing with a blue pen on standard lined paper, maintaining margins, and double-spacing. When completed during the class period, the assignment can be collected at or before the end of the session. When done as homework, it is customarily received during the subsequent class period.

The instructor then takes the students' assignments and corrects them, using a pencil or pen of a color in contrast to that used by the students. Red is the color most frequently used in correcting although some instructors prefer green as being psychologically less disturbing to the students. The extent of the correcting done is relative. At one extreme, a student who generally writes very well may be corrected more stringently and thoroughly. For example, his "I am studying Economics" may be corrected to "I am studying economics." At the other extreme, the student who generally has great difficulty in writing may be corrected with relative leniency. Only the more serious errors (in terms of frequency of occurrence, for example) may be corrected. Thus, "a object" may be corrected to "an object," but "studying Economics" may be allowed to pass for the time being.

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Common techniques for correcting spelling errors are to draw a slanted line through incorrect letters, to insert a caret where a letter is missing, and to indicate the correct letter or letters above the word.

Non-spelling mistakes may be referred to as "other mistakes," lacking a better designation. These include errors in structure or grammar, in punctuation, and in vocabulary. Examples of these three categories of mistakes are: "I chose it because is practical" (structure): "The officers and their wives, arrived late" (punctuation): and "He made his job well" (vocabulary).

In the procedure being described, the instructor designates exactly which errors are to be included on the correction sheet. In the case of spelling errors, an oval or ellipse is drawn around the word and the abbreviation "Sp" (for "spelling") is written outside and near the top left portion of the oval. A specific misspelling is so designated only once although the same word may have been corrected two or more times in the same assignment.

Other mistakes (i.e., non-spelling errors) are selected, underlined, and then numbered consecutively, as follows:

1 doing
He did not feel like ~~to do~~ it.

It is mentioned[2] in children's literature.

3 meals
They always eat three ~~dinners~~ a day.

The portion of a given sentence to be underlined is restricted to include only that which is essential to draw attention to the nature of the specific mistake--but no more. For example, in the sentence "My cousin, Robert, lives in United States" only "in United States" needs to be underlined (with the appropriate correction: the insertion of the word "the" before "United States"). As in the case of spelling errors, the same type of mistake is not specially designated more than once on the same paper. As a general rule, in an average composition of 150 to 200 words there may be three or four spelling errors and four or five other mistakes singled out for inclusion on the correction sheet.

At the earliest opportunity after having received his corrected assignment, the student should prepare his correction sheet. This may be done in class or incorporated as part of the homework assignment. It is convenient to have the students prepare the first few correction sheets in class so that the instructor may assist and train them to prepare the sheets according to the prescribed manner.

The correction sheet should follow an established form. A standardized heading should be used, clearly identifying the paper as a correction sheet corresponding to a specific assignment. Below the heading, the paper will have two clearly-titled subdivisions: "Spelling Errors" and "Other Mistakes." Under the heading "Spelling Errors" the student will write first, beside the left marginal line, his original misspelling of each word, then a dash, and then the word written correctly five times along the line with comma separations. The words are not listed one below the other since this encourages simple copying. Hopefully, the repeated writing of each word horizontally will help reinforce the memorization of its correct spelling. The original misspelling of the word at the beginning of the line is needed for the preparation of subsequent tests.

The specific procedure for the indication of other (or non-spelling) mistakes requires that they be listed in the same order as they appear numbered on the original paper. Only the underlined portion is included. First, the sentence or phrase is written correctly. Then, the specific items which were incorrect in the original are underlined, and the student's mistakes are indicated in parentheses above. If a mistake consists only of an omission, a small "o" is written above the word or mark of punctuation, which should be underlined. These are some examples of other mistakes as they are to appear on the correction sheet:

(on)
1. He is interested in history.

2. . . . listening, speaking, and reading skills.

(tripulation)

3. The crew had gone ashore.

Students are encouraged to keep a copy of the correction sheet, although this is optional. A student may write out an additional copy, prepare a carbon copy, or make a photocopy of his sheet to retain. This may be useful to him in preparing for subsequent tests. The instructor, of course, may make this an obligatory procedure if he chooses.

It is important to receive the original (previously corrected) assignment paper along with the correction sheet. The instructor quickly checks to be sure that the correction sheet has been properly prepared and includes all the designated errors. The correction sheet is retained and kept on file--there being a separate file for each student. Then the instructor marks the top of the original composition to acknowledge receipt of its corresponding correction sheet. This may be done with a rubber date stamp plus the instructor's initials, or the instructor may simply make a brief notation, such as "C.S.," followed by the date and his or her initials. Subsequently, the original assignment paper is returned to the student, who retains it and reviews the corrections as frequently as he desires. If he has kept a copy of its corresponding correction sheet, he may review it at will also. In this way he is motivated to overcome his faulty habits prior to a test.

The preparation and administration of the test based upon the correction sheets is an individualized procedure. At intervals which seem appropriate and, in any case, after several correction sheets have been collected from each student, the instructor prepares the specific individualized tests. An announcement in advance of a test is usually effective in motivating students to review their corrected compositions and copies of correction sheets (if the latter have been made).

Each test is prepared according to a standardized form. First, there is a heading indicating the student's name, the test identification, and the date. Below the heading, the page has the same two subdivisions as the correction sheet, titled accordingly: "Spelling Errors" and "Other Mistakes." After the first subtitle, "Spelling Errors," these instructions are given: "Correct all the words which are not properly spelled; some of them may be correct." There follows a list of perhaps six to ten words, selected at random from among those words which the student has included on his correction sheets. Most of them appear in the originally misspelled forms, but one or two are spelled correctly. The student is instructed to leave the latter untouched while rewriting the misspelled words in the correct way.

After the second subtitle, "Other Mistakes," the following instructions are provided: "Correct all mistakes; some sentences may already be completely correct." There follows a series of perhaps six to ten sentences constructed from phrases selected at random from among those included on the correction sheets. Most of these are presented in the originally mistaken forms, but one

or two may be largely or entirely correct. Also, each sentence on the test may be a combination of two or even three phrases chosen from among the various "Other Mistakes" items to be found on the correction sheets. Examples of test sentences containing more than one mistake are:

1. The children enjoys listening fairy tales.

2. It depend in his success in finding other job.

3. John asked "What time it is?"

At the time of the test each student is handed his own individualized test paper. He is told to mark on the paper itself and that he may use a pencil in order to modify his work easily if he desires to do so during the testing period. A reasonable amount of time is allowed to give the large majority (if not all) of the students sufficient time to complete the test. Students who finish before others may turn in their papers and be permitted to leave the room early or to remain and study on their own.

Each test must, of course, be corrected and scored individually. Each spelling item is marked one point correct or one point incorrect. If a student correctly spells one part of a word but overlooks an error in another part of the same word, he may be given half a point credit. If he makes no change in a correctly spelled word, he receives one full point of credit.

The "Other Mistakes" section of the test must be corrected with great care. Within a given sentence each originally mistaken item counts as one point. The student receives credit for correctly amending each mistake and also for leaving untouched each item which he originally wrote incorrectly but which appears correct on the test. Whenever he fails to do either of these, he loses a point.

In scoring each test, the overall percentage of correct answers is calculated on the basis of one third for the spelling section and two thirds for the other mistakes section. Thus, if a student obtained 90% correct in the spelling part and 80% correct in the other mistakes part, his final score would be determined on the basis of an average of 90, 80, and 80, which, in this case, would be 83 1/3%.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that a drawback of the correction sheet and testing technique is the added burden placed upon the instructor at the time of preparing the individualized tests. If the class is a large one, this disadvantage may be diminished in part by preparing shorter tests and by including some of the same commonly made mistakes on all tests. Two major and definite advantages of the technique are: (a) Each student is motivated in an individualized way to overcome his particular composition problems--whichever they may be, and (b) a strong emphasis is constantly placed on correct forms rather than on mistakes--thus stimulating and helping students in a positive manner to overcome weaknesses and faulty habits.